ISSN 0317-2473

Research Discussion Paper No. 59

A Study of the Contemporary Population Migration in the People's Republic of China

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May 1989

1 Introduction

Like in most of the developing countries of the world, the contemporary population migration in China is also intimately associated with its economic development process. As is generally known, in attempting to forestall problems inherent in too rapid urbanization, internal migration in China has been strictly controlled by the government policy, especially for the changes in permanent residence from rural areas or small urban places to large cities. The general principle for China's urbanization is summaried in the following three sentences:

1. strictly limiting the size of big cities (locations with 500,000 or more residents),
2. properly developing medium-sized cities (those with population between 200,000 and 499,999), and
3. encouraging the growth of small cities (those with population less than 200,000) and county towns.

Even under these controls, considerable migration does occur, much of it for job–related reasons, or for education. Another trend of population migration in China, notably temporary movement, or circulation, started in 1979, as a result of the reformation of national economic system and a relaxation on restrictions governing population mobility from villages to towns and cities. One of the most important steps in the reformation of economic system is the introduction of the responsibility system in rural areas, which results in the release of the great surplus labor force from agriculture. Also due to the opportunities in urban areas created by rising urban living standards, temporary mobility has increased greatly for the past ten years. Therefore the contemporary internal population migration in China may be viewed as comprising of two parts: (a) permanent migration and (b) temporary mobility, identified by change in household registration record.

The purpose of the present paper is to provide a rough idea of the characteristics of migration in China, by presenting some findings from an investigation on population migration in Shandong Province, in which the author took part in 1987. Admittedly, one province cannot be representative of the whole country in every aspect, since both physical and socio-economic conditions vary from one part of China to another. However, one can obtain some insight into the general trend in the whole country from the findings of this research. A comparative analysis with the internal migration situations in some other Asian countries is added to make the results more interesting.

2 Major Findings

The investigation conducted in Shandong Province is a part of a larger project emphasizing the transition of China's rural population and the development of small towns. This project is sponsored by the Canadian International Development Research Centre. Shandone Province is located in the Eastern Coastal areas of China. It is an industrially and

agriculturally developed, and populous province in the country. Four towns are involved in the investigation, the features and the geographical locations of which are as follows (Also see figure 1):

Puji town: locates in an area with abundant mineral resources;

Daotian town: locates in a highly developed agricultural area;

Chengyang town: locates closely to a big city—Qingdao city;

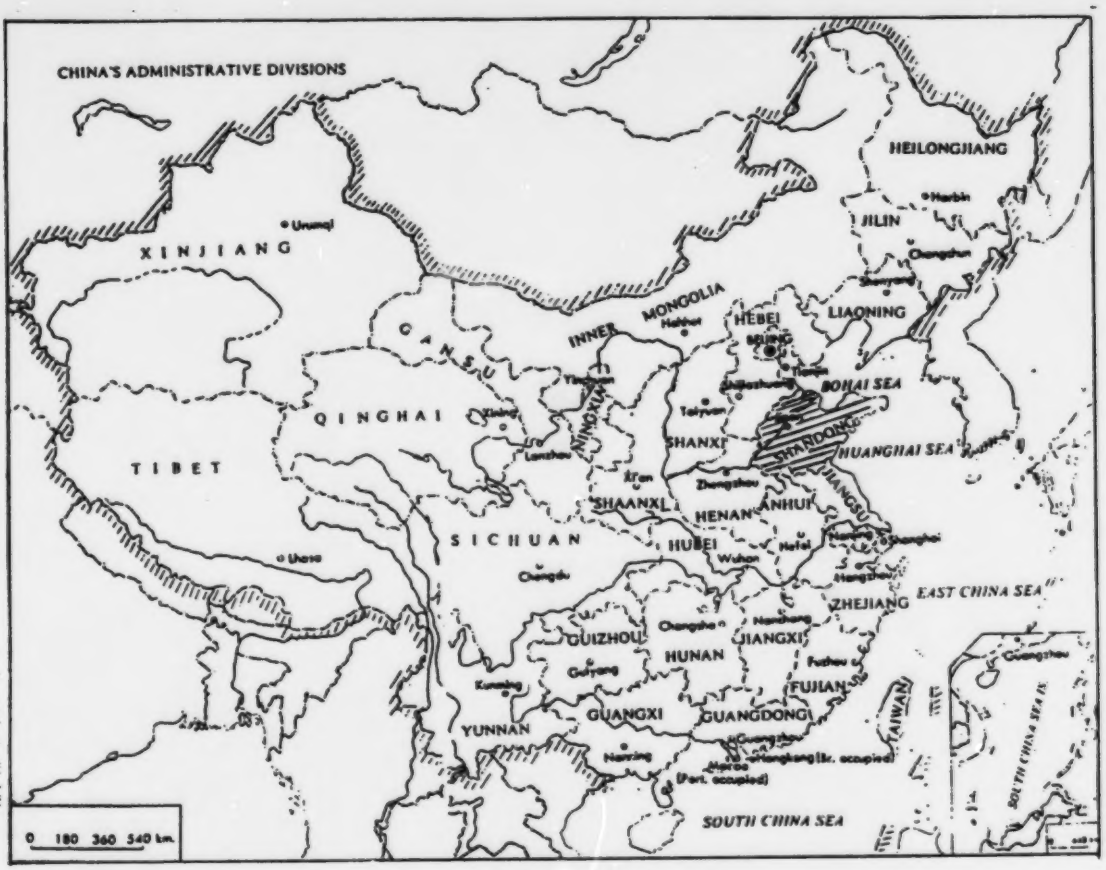
Taocun town: locates in a communication hub of the province.

The major findings from the investigation comprise of four parts: (i) amount and degree of permanent migration, (ii) types of migration, (iii) reasons for migration and (iv) the characteristics of migrants.

2.1 Amount of Permanent Migration

Two types of migration, namely permanent and temporary migration have been mentioned earlier in this paper. In China, each individual has an official place of residence, the record of which is maintained at the brigade level in rural areas and at the neighborhood level in urban places by the Public Security Bureau. A person is considered a permanent migrant only if the move involved a change in his household registration [1].

With the improvement of socioeconomic conditions and service facilities, small towns are getting more and more attractive to the rural peasants. Meanwhile, the strict household registration policy governing population movement has been adjusted to meet the new circumstances of economic reformation. Many peasants who want to be engaged in industry or trade in small or county towns are also granted a permanent change in their residence. These accelerate the concentration of population into small towns. Therefore, the population of small towns has increased noticeably since the early 1980s and permanent migration as an important component of population growth has been found in all the four towns. The increase of population for each of the four towns from 1980 to 1986 is shown in Table 1. Among the four towns, only in Chengyang, the natural increase contributes more to the total population increase than in-migration. The reason for this is that many people are drawn away from Chengyang to the nearby big city—Qingdao. Therefore, Chengyang has experienced a process of net out-migration for many years from 1980 to 1986. The situations found in the other three towns, where in-migration accounted for a major part of total population increase, are generally consistent with the government's policy of "encouraging the growth of county towns." Remember that the figures in Table 1 only cover the permanent migrants and exclude the temporary migrants, who are engaged in various economic activities in towns but continue to be officially registered in their places of origin. It will be shown in the next section that the amount of permanent migration only accounts for a smaller proportion in comparison to temporary migration in the total migration flow.



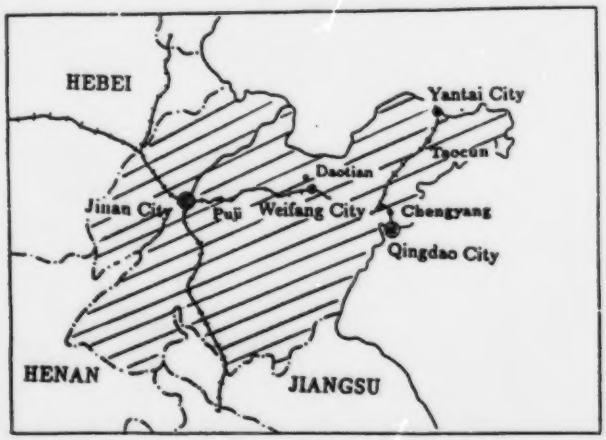


Figure 1: Location of the Areas Under Study

Table 1: Increase of Population and Its Sources, 1980-86, By Towns

Towns	Total population 1980	Total population 1986	Total increase 1980-86	In-migration as a % of total increase	Natural increase as a % of total increase
Puji	5,100	6,107	1,007	80.9	19.1
Daotian	9,344	9,850	506	53.4	46.6
Chengyang	17,475	18,271	796	19.4	80.7
Taocun	5,425	6,651	1,226	83.7	16.3

Table 2: Distances of Migration: Four Towns, 1980-1986

Distance (km)	% Distribution
0 — 9.9	47.9
10 — 49.9	32.3
50+	19.8

2.2 Types of Migration

Migrants are classified by (1) place of origin; and (2) status of residence.

According to the first criterion, it was found that people from rural area accounted for 69.94% of the total in-migrants, while people from other towns and cities 15.27% and 13.97% of the total in-migrants, respectively. Most of the rural to town migration was motivated for economic reasons, i.e. farmers came to the towns, looking for employment, higher incomes and better living conditions. Migration from other towns and cities was mainly due to transfer of government employees or school graduates arriving to take up new jobs. Most of the demobilized soldiers, retired cadres and workers also fall into this category. This finding indicates that migration from countryside to small towns is the main stream of the contemporary migration. Meanwhile, counterstreams from city to town also exist.

Distance was an obvious intervening obstacle in the migration process. As is manifested in Table 2, there is a strong negative association between the number of migrants and the distance. Therefore, Ravenstein's law regarding distance and migrants is found applicable to China, namely great body of migrants proceed only a short distance.

According to the second criterion, migrants fall into four types:

A. those who have changed their household registration records to the town;

B. those who have been living in the town for more than one year without their household registration in the town;

C. those who have been living in the town for less than one year without their household registration in the town;

D. those who do not live in the town at all, but commute to the town everyday.

Table 3: Migration Distribution by Types of Residence, Showing Places of Origin: Four Towns, 1980-86

Type	Number of in-migrants	% Distribution	Place of Origin			
			countryside%	town%	city%	Total%
A	426	34.6	59.9	23.2	15.2	100.0
B	185	15.0	81.1	11.4	7.6	100.0
C	129	10.5	80.6	10.1	9.3	100.0
D	491	39.9	71.7	11.2	16.7	100.0
Total	1231	100				

The percentage of distribution of migrants by place of origin is shown in Table 3. It can be seen that in relative terms, migrants from rural, town and city origins rank first, second and third respectively from among the total migrants irrespective of the type of migration counted. Thus migrants of rural origin constitute the main component of the migration stream in China.

It is seen from Table 3 that about 40 % of the total migrants are commuters, 72% of whom live in the countryside. This finding is similar to the one noted for India that "the joint family system operation in the village enhances rather than hinders the movement of the married male" [3, p.57]. A man may find it easier to go to cities or towns to earn money while the rest of his family are at home working in the native soil.

2.3 Reasons for Migration

Information on the reasons for migration is as shown in Table 4:

The data show that economic factors play a primary role: reason 1, 2, 8, 9 and 10 are job-related. Migrants who cited these five reasons accounted for 73.9% of the total.

There are some differences in reasons for migration between male and female migrants. The most important reason for male migrants is job transference, which accounts for 23.19% of the total male migrants. For females, the most important ways of migration is through the relative assistance, which accounts for 27.8% of the total female migrants. Marriage is also an important factor for female migration, while for males, it is not significant. The percentages of demobilized soldiers and retired workers are much higher for males than for females.

With special reference to the rural to town migrants, towns play an important role in absorbing the surplus agricultural labour force. In 1986, the four towns absorbed about 48.48% surplus agricultural labour force from the nearby rural areas. The major industries that absorbed surplus agricultural labor force are: departments which are in short of labor force, such as goods transportation and environmental protection, temporary construction work, and newly emerged rural industrial and service enterprises. Many of the released labor force also engaged in various crafts such as: tailoring, carpentry and blacksmithing.

Table 4: Reasons For Migration: Four Towns, 1980–86 (%)

Reasons	Total	Male	Female
1. Cadres assigned to new posts	13.5	17.2	8.8
2. School graduates taking new jobs	12.1	15.0	8.4
3. Family reunion	2.2	1.4	3.2
4. Demobilized soldiers	6.3	11.0	0.2
5. Marriage	11.5	2.8	22.7
6. Retirement	2.4	4.1	0.2
7. Policy rectification	1.0	1.0	0.9
8. Workers transferring jobs	23.5	23.1	24.0
9. Relative assistance	21.1	15.9	27.8
10. Encouraged by new policy	3.7	5.3	1.7
11. Other	2.8	3.2	2.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Others may run small shops and restaurants. Still others come temporarily to towns to sell agricultural products or handicrafts in markets.

2.4 Characteristics of Migrants

A. Age and sex differentials: 77.6% of migrants to the four towns tended to be in the 16–30 age group. Among those, the 21–25 age group is the most migratory and accounted for 40.4% of the total.

Males are found to be more migratory than females. Male and female migrants form 56.6% and 43.4% respectively of their totals.

B. Marital status: 56.6% of the migrants are married, 42.7% single, while the divorce and the widowed form only 0.7% of the total.

The percent of the married among the male migrants is 63.7, which is higher than that among the females (52.2).

C. Level of education: 59.0% of the in-migrants have a middle school level of education, while 30.5% have a high school level of education. The average level of education for migrants is relatively higher than that of their non-migrant counterparts.

Male migrants generally have a higher level of education than female migrants. Migrants who have middle school education or lower accounted for 57.7% and 71.5% of the male and female migrants respectively.

D. Employment rate: Employment rate for in-migrants is 97.4%. There is not much difference in employment rate between male and female migrants, but it varies with

Table 5: Sex and Age Distribution of In-migrants: Four Towns, 1980–86

Age	Total		Male		Female	
group	population	%	population	%	population	%
Total	1223	100.0	692	100.0	531	100.0
16–20	257	21.0	102	14.7	155	29.2
21–25	494	40.4	271	39.2	223	42.0
26–30	198	16.2	107	15.5	91	17.1
31–35	112	9.2	73	10.6	39	7.3
36–40	49	4.0	38	5.5	11	2.1
41–45	45	3.7	39	5.6	6	1.1
46–50	22	1.8	18	2.6	4	0.8
51–55	22	1.8	21	3.0	1	0.2
56–60	11	0.9	11	1.6	0	0.0
61–65	9	0.7	8	1.2	1	0.2
66–70	3	0.3	3	0.4	0	0.0
71+	1	0.1	1	0.2	0	0.0

age. For instance, for people above or below 50 years of age, the employment rate are 60–90% and 95–100% respectively.

Data on age, gender, marital status and level of education of migrants are shown in Table 5, 6, and 7.

The general characteristics of China's contemporary migration as reflected from a case study in Shandong Province may be compared to those of other Asian countries. We saw the following:

- Most migrations are caused by economic factors, i.e. the main reason migrants give for moving is the availability of higher paying jobs at the urban destination. For example, in Korea and Thailand employment opportunities are always ranked at the top of the motives of urban in-migration [3, p.51];
- Migration is age and sex selective in the sense that young adults (16-25 years old) are the most likely to move and male migrants take a slightly higher proportion of the total migration. One disparity between China and Korea is that there is usually a peak of later age for female migrants than for male migrants in Korea [3, p.54] whereas this is not noticed in China;
- There is a positive correlation between migration and level of educational, which is also found in India, Malaysia and Thailand [3, p.55-6];
- There is a negative correlation between volume of migration and distance.

Table 6: Marital Status of In-migrants: Four Towns, 1980–86

Age Group	Total	Married	Single	Divorced and Widowed
Total	100.00	56.60	42.67	0.73
15–39	100.00	52.03	47.34	0.63
40–59	100.00	99.02	—	0.98
≥ 60	100.00	94.74	—	5.26
Male	100.00	63.73	35.41	0.87
15–39	100.00	57.44	41.88	0.68
40–59	100.00	98.88	—	1.12
≥ 60	100.00	94.44	—	5.56
Female	100.00	47.29	52.15	0.56
15–39	100.00	45.98	53.45	0.57
40–59	100.00	100.00	—	—
≥ 60	100.00	100.00	—	—

Table 7: Levels of Education of In-migrants: Four Towns, 1980–86

Age group	Total	Illiterate	Primary school	Middle school	High school	Technical school	University	Above university
Total	100.00	0.4	5.1	59.0	30.5	4.3	0.6	0.1
15–39	100.00	—	4.7	84.8	8.6	1.9	—	—
40–59	100.00	—	2.6	55.5	35.1	5.9	0.9	—
≥ 60	100.00	1.5	9.4	39.6	44.2	4.2	0.8	0.4
Male	100.00	—	2.3	55.4	35.4	5.8	0.8	0.2
15–39	100.00	—	3.9	83.3	10.8	2.0	—	—
40–59	100.00	—	0.4	52.7	37.2	8.8	0.8	—
≥ 60	100.00	—	4.3	39.6	50.4	3.6	1.4	0.7
Female	100.00	0.9	7.9	62.7	25.4	2.8	0.4	—
15–39	100.00	—	5.2	85.8	7.1	1.9	—	—
40–59	100.00	—	5.3	59.0	32.5	2.1	1.1	—
≥ 60	100.00	3.2	15.1	39.7	37.3	4.8	—	—

There are also many differences between China and other Asian countries. For instance, the influence of foreign trade is not as significant in China as in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. Due to its great population pressure, the Chinese government is more sensitive to the migration towards large urban areas. Therefore, small cities and county towns are the most migratorily active areas.

In summary, patterns of internal migration are a reflection and a result of the process of a country's socio-economic development. Government policy has significant influence over the migration process which in turn largely affects the country's economy. Therefore, an appropriate strategy for the regulating of internal migration is vital to the developing countries.

3 Acknowledgement

Thanks are due to Professor P. Krishnan, Department of Sociology, University of Alberta, for his advice and encouragement.

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